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NATURALISTIC ELEMENTS IN THE EARLY TWENTY FIRST CENTURY SELECTED AMERICAN NOVELS

A SYNOPSIS OF THE PROPOSED STUDY SUBMITTED TO SHIVAJI UNIVERSITY, KOLHAPUR

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INTRODUCTION

The present study is an attempt to examine the naturalistic elements in the selected novels of American novelists of early twenty first century. The prime aim of the proposed research is to analyze these unnoticed traits of naturalism in the selected novels.

Naturalism is a movement in the literature which started broadly from 1865. It first originated in France. It is influenced by the philosophy of Determinism, Darwinism and Emily Zola and is acted as forces which control the characters' lives. The prime characteristics of naturalism are environment, heredity, narrative detachment, determinism, pessimism, poverty, survival, Darwinism, realism etc. The principle theoretician and major exponent of French naturalism movement is Emily Zola who first advocated clearly in his essay 'Naturalism on the Stage'. His well known works are *Germinie Lacerteux* (1865) and *Therese Raquin* (1868). In its preface he has described himself *natualiste*. According to him men's lives and actions are determined by heredity and its environment. Zola's influence is remained at present in the novels, plays and poetry. This movement of naturalism has spread all over Germany, France, Russia, England and America. The major luminaries were G.M. Conrad, the Hart brothers, Bleibtreu and Bolsche in Germany. Besides France and Germany it is existed in the work of Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Tolstoy and Gorky. As it is started in France, it flourished in the writing of American writers and other countries also. The major exponents in American literature are Frank Norris, Stephen Crane and Theodore Dreiser. Naturalism is introduced in American Literature by Frank Norris's 'Wheat Trilogy' as

social environment affected the farmers particularly the clashes of wheat growers. In his other novel *McTeague* (1899) he depicts a San Francisco dentist McTeague and his wife Trina as they have hereditary defects. Dreiser is known and the acknowledged greatness of his work '*Sister Carrie* (1900) and *An American Tragedy* (1925).The theme of authenticity is introduced by him. 'Heredity' and 'Environment' are the key words of this movement. Its effects are long lasting. This theory is based on Darwin's Theory of Evolution which is discussed in detail in *On the Origin of Species* (1859). The key terms of his works are natural selection and survival of the fittest. It is mainly depicted in the work of Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* (1903) in which Buck (a dog) understands the importance of the survival of the fittest and he struggled for life. Everyone's life is determined by his heredity and by external forces. It is a stark realism. Determinism, objectivism, pessimism and surprising are central ideas of the writings.

LIFE AND WORKS OF THE NOVELISTS

A) LOUISE ERDRICH

Louise Erdrich is a Native American author of thirteen novels. She has also written volumes of poetry, short stories, children's books, and memoir of the early motherhood. Her notable works are *Love Medicine* (1984) which has won the National Book Critics Circle Award, *Track* (1988), *The Bingo Palace* (1994), *The Plague of Doves* (2008) and *The Round House* (2012) which was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize Fiction in 2009.

THE PLAGUE OF DOVES (2008)

The novel is published in 2008. The span of the novel is nearly a century and begins with the murder of a farm family. Pluto, fictional town

troubled with the past which is mingled with Ojibwe reservation and community. Murder of the farm family is portrayed realistically. Hanging of the four Indians haunts the town. Moosum runs away with his beloved Junesse. The violence, discrimination, sexuality and love affairs shape the characters of the novels. The influence of the past, vengeance, sin and redemption are the keywords of the novel. The central characters of the novel are affected by it. The novelists used multiple narrator techniques in the novel.

THE ROUND HOUSE (2012)

This novel won 'National Book Award for Fiction' in 2012. It is published in 2012. Joe Coutts is the central figure in the novel. The beginning of the novel he comes to know that his mother 'Gerladine' has been raped near the round house. His father was a tribal judge. Joe and his friend went to the round house in order to find out any clues about it. Geraldine faces great depression and many difficulties after the rape. Her depression is the product of Linden act. Linden disturbed her life. Linda Wishkob, she has been abandoned by her family due to her hereditary problem. Joe looks towards duality and uncertainty of his mind due to Linden who works as an external force. He takes the revenge of it. Stark reality is given in the novel.

B) JESMYN WARD

Jesmyn Ward is an American novelist. Her notable works are *Salvage the Bones* (2011), *The Fire This Time* (2016), *Where the Lines Bleeds (*2008) and *Sing, Unburied, Sing (2017)*. She is the first American woman who has won twice 'National Book Award for Fiction'.

SALVAGE THE BONES (2011)

'Salvage the Bones' won the national book award for fiction in 2011. The novel depicts the picture of a working class African-American family in Mississippi. Hurricane Katrina is the key term in the novel. It indicates preparation for Hurricane Katrina and how they all suffer due to it. The novel is divided in 12 chapters. Each chapter is either proceeding, during or the following Hurricane Katrina. The family struggles due to storm. A tree falls on their house. The family notices the water flooding the house and moves upstairs. The water forced them to swim to the nearby house which was safe from flooding. The family was trying to make their way to the house through the storm. Esch and Manny developed romantic relation which turned into sex which causes pregnancy to Esch. Esch has to face many problems of it as well as the problems created due to Hurricane Katrina. Her daddy pushed her off the trunk in order to drop China's Puppies into the flood. The family is not only struggled here but also China's and her Puppies due to Hurricane Katrina. The family took shelter with Big Henry. Daddy took responsibility of Esch health.

The important characters in the novels are Esch, Skeetah, Daddy,Randall,Junior,China-pit bull,Mama, Manny,Big Henry etc. The Hurricane exhibits the ultimate the power in the novel. Esch lives in a Darwinian world where survival is centre. Hurricane Katrina's destructive force implied in the novel. It becomes clearer when Hurricane Katrina sweeps in and raises the stakes in the game of survival. China and her puppies struggled for survival.

SING, UNBURIED, SING (2017)

It is written by Jesmyn Ward and published in 2017. This novel begins with a boy Jojo making a bold claim- 'I like to think, I know what deaths'. He helps his grandfather named Pop. It is set in 'Bois Sauvage' a fictional town. His mother Leonie is black who struggle with drug use. Jojo's father Michael who is white and in prison. Jojo has to take responsibilities of his sister named Kayla. The novel explores both the deep effects of racism and injustice of this fractured family and the ways its member punish themselves for how they have chosen to handle it. The two ghosts are a reminder of Jojo's quest for maturity and manhood. The theme of the novel is family, heritage and homecoming. There are internal and external forces affect the characters and behave according to it. The black and white are to determine their life. Jojo's struggle is the centre of the novel.

C) DON DELILLO

The publication of *White Noise* in 1985 won him the 'National Book Award' and made him known as novelist, playwright and essayist. He was twice a finalist for Pulitzer Prize for Fiction *Mao II* (1991) and *Underworld* (1997) respectively. He has written *Falling Man* (2007). He addresses the issues like global terrorism, the cold war, sport, nuclear war, language, politics and economics.

FALLING MAN (2007)

The novel is published in 2007 which is concerned with a survivor of the 9/11 attacks and the effect of his experience of that day have on his life thereafter. As the novel begins Keith Neudecker, a 39 year old lawyer works in the World Trade Centre escapes from the building. He injured. He walks to the apartment which he lived previously with his son and his wife. Keith Neudecker experienced the harsh reality of life that he could

not control his present and future. He could live his life in the fear of his environment. It depicts the most sordid events of reality in details in order to expose the situation of concerned incidents.

D) TOM PIAZZA

Tom Piazza is known not only as a novelist but also a writer on American music. His well-known novels are *A Free State* (2015) and *City of Refuge* (2008). His most interesting, the post-Katrina Manifesto is *Why New Orleans Matters* (2005). He mainly highlights cultural and personal identity as a central theme of his writing. He is also the winner of the ASCAP- Deems Taylor Award for music writing.

CITY OF REFUGE (2008)

It is written about the city New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina. The novel 'City of Refuge' published in 2008 portrays two families suffering from Hurricane Katrina. One family is black named William and another family is white named Donaldson. The white family evacuates before the storms begins. It moved to Chicago with their relatives and the black family remains there for a long. They are forced to Houston. These families separated during this storm. Craig Donaldson went to New Orleans as an Editor of a newspaper which shows his intimacy towards his city. Craig Donaldson and his wife have faced troubles during the storm. The Williams have also faced the equally the same problems. It is a novel concerned with the detailed lives of characters. It is Hurricane Katrina which changes the course of their lives. The fate of the family has changed due to the beginning of the rain and the wind. These families are not only scattered but also faced struggles due to external forces to reconnect with one another. The hardships of these two families are depicted in the novels in the background of Hurricane Katrina. Here the determination of the

characters was to come back and rebuild their houses as it is seen also in the novel of ‘Grapes of Wrath’ which is written by John Steinbeck. The writer wrote another book on the same theme that is ‘Why New Orleans Matters’.

A FREE STATE (2015)

This novel is about race, violence, and identity set on the eve of the Civil War. The slavery is the main key idea of the novel which depicts Henry Sims, a slave and brilliant musician. He is well-known with James Douglass who is white. Black and white performers are not allowed to appear together onstage. The naturalistic elements are directly or indirectly portrayed in the novel.

E) ERIC PUCHNER

Eric Puchner is the author of the story collection, *Music Through the Floor* (2005) and *Last Day on Earth* (2017). The novel *Model Home* (2010) was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award and the Barnes & Noble Discover Award and has won a California Book Award.

MODEL HOME (2010)

The plight of the American people during great recession is neatly depicted in contemporary novels. These novels are ‘Model Home’ by Eric Puchner, ‘Union Atlantic’ by Adam Haslett etc. In Model Home the protagonist Warren Ziller’s investment in real estate becomes a spectacular failure. He and his family move from their community in California to a sad little home in the desert development but this change is not welcomed by his family. This migration is an external force forced them to live such a life in which they live unhappily.

The novelist mentioned above and their selected novels have been considered for the proposed study.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The present study aims at analyzing the naturalistic elements in the selected early twenty first century American novels.

OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the naturalistic elements in the selected novels of Don Delillo, Eric Puchner, Jesmyn Ward, Louise Erdrich and Tom Piazza.

2. To apply the theory of naturalism to the selected novels.

HYPOTHESIS

The selected novels deal with the impact of naturalism found in early twenty first century American novels. The life depicted in the novels is determined by naturalistic elements.

REVIEW OF RELEVENT LITERATUE

The views about the works of the selected novelists are in the form of critical essays, book reviews and historical surveys. The selected novelists are leading novelist in the early twenty first American Literature. Extensive research has been done on all of them. The following research have done on Louise Edrich as ‘Race and Space in the Novels of Louise Erdrich’, ‘History, Identity and Culture in the select novels of Louise Erdrich’, ‘Perception of Womanhood a study of the select fiction of Louise Erdrich’ etc. The other articles are ‘The Artist is Absent: Locating the Avant-Garde in the work of Don Delillo’ in Acadmia, ‘The roar was still in the air, the buckling rumble of the fall’ which is about the resounding

narrative of catastrophe in post 9/11 literature. The selected novels are not studied with naturalistic perspectives. The following novels studied with naturalism are *The Open Boat(1897),Mc Teague(1899), Sister Carrie(1900), The call of the wild(1903), The Untouchable(1935)* etc. Vinaybhushan V. states in his thesis on Conrad's works, all the characters are the products of the interaction between the external and internal nature because for a naturalist, nature is a determinant factor in life. Naturalism not only brings out the hidden potentialities in man, but its study helps develop a mature and comprehensive understanding of man, nature, and society. The characteristics of naturalism are determinism, objectivism, pessimism, environment and heredity which will be observed in the selected novels. Hence the researcher intends to explore the same.

RATIONALE BEHIND THE SELECTION OF THE TOPIC

Human beings are social animal and live in the society. The society governs the human as an external force. Man develops his personality, language and culture by living in the society and environment. His personality and development depend on his heredity. Naturalistic elements play important role in the life of a human being. Humans bear the impact of it. Though he learns and gets developed from society and environment, there are still sometime adverse effects on him. There are always unavoidable internal and external forces like natural calamities, man-made calamities, his hereditary defects, terrorist attacks, deluge, drought, depression, the great recession etc which affect human life. He has to face such kind of problems throughout his life. It indicates the stark reality of life. His natural instincts motivate him to try to come out of it and hence his struggle begins. The present study deals with the same theme and the novels are selected accordingly.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The scope of this study is limited one. Only the selected novels are considered for the study. The selected novels for the present study are the representative of the beginning of twenty first century's whole scenario. It aims at finding naturalistic elements in the selected novels like heredity, environment, survival, Darwinism, narrative detachment, social environment, pessimism, poverty, realism etc. Though this research work occupies a broad perspective, it touches to the realism, post modernism, post colonialism and natives which are concerned with American social, cultural and historical view of the society. As the heredity and environment is the central idea of naturalistic philosophy, the novels are selected accordingly.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Naturalism is one of the most important literally movements. The researcher attempts to study the selected novels of early twenty first century American novels. The selected novels are not ever studied according to the perspective taken. The selected novels deal with the impact of naturalistic elements and hence show the impact of postmodernism, post-post modernism, realism and Native American Renaissance. They certainly have the elements of naturalism. The study does not deny that the human and animals struggle to conquer these naturalistic elements.

METHODOLOGY

The textual analysis, analytical, evaluative and interpretative and comparative methods will be used for this research. The modern critical theories are suitable in order to state the critical view. The focus will on

the close reading of the primary and secondary sources. The background, improvement, current conditions and environmental interactions of one or more individuals, groups, and communities can be perceived, recorded and analyzed for stages of patterns in relation to internal and external influences.

TENTATIVE CHAPTER SCHEME

The following is a tentative chapter scheme for the proposed research study.

CHAPTER- I

A) Introduction

B) American Literary Tradition

B) Selected Novelists: Life and Works

C) Aim and Objectives of the study

D) Hypothesis

E) Review of relevant literature

F) Rational behind the selection of the topic

G) Significance of the study

H) Scope and Limitation of the study

CHAPTER- II A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A) Naturalism- Concept: The Rise and Development of Naturalism

B) Literary Naturalism

C) Impact of European Naturalism

CHAPTER – III NATIVE AMERICAN RENISSANCE

A) *The Plague of Doves* (2008)

B) *The Round House* (2012)

C) *A Free State* (2015)

D) *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017)

CHAPTER – IV 9/11 AND THE GREAT RECESSION

A) *Falling Man* (2007)

B) *Model Home* (2010)

CHAPTER – V HURRICANE KATRINA

A) *City of Refuge* (2007)

B) *Salvage the Bones* (2011)

CHAPTER – VI CONCLUSION

This will be followed by the detailed select bibliography

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Research Student Research Guide

Place- Kolhapur

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